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ABSTRACT

A four-day workshop dealing with problems related to human sexuality and relationship counseling followed the assumption that impact and desensitization at the personal level increases the participants' ability to apply the material covered to their particular counseling setting. Initially, desensitization was facilitated through the use of explicit films, while the discussion encompassed human sexuality, including practiced techniques for the treatment of sexual dysfunction. Later experiences centered around specific exercises conducted in small groups and dyads. The overall objective was to help participants clarify and expand their own attitudes on relationships and sexuality. In the area of relationship counseling, the focus was on facilitating communication within the dyad. Also discussed were specific interview techniques for dealing with resentments, grievances, attractions, and changes wanted in the relationship. The workshop sought to synthesize the material and apply the techniques to the participants' particular setting and personality. (Author/BW)

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A Workshop for Paraprofessionals

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Human sexuality has become an "in" area for psychologists. At this convention's exhibit area, the EDCOA display, featuring sexually explicit movies, is by far the most popular. With the help of these films, I suspect that the number of courses and workshops on human sexuality will grow at an astonishing rate.

My intention here is to focus on a four-day workshop entitled "Human Sexuality and Relationship Counseling." Because the social workers participating were exposed to questions related to sexuality, marital and pre-marital problems, and what constitutes "normality", there existed an acute need for more information on these topics. Moreover, experiential, small group, in depth, and desensitization activities are needed for impact at the personal level. Awareness of ones own sexuality and value system contributes to the more competent counseling of clients with sexual doubts and problems.

With these objectives in mind, didactic material was emphasized at the beginning, while the experiential gained increasing emphasis as the workshop progressed. Since the four-day agenda had been distributed prior to the workshop, the security of some structure was provided and the transition was easily accomplished. From the second day on, the participants spent much of their time in one of three small groups, the composition of each being determined by using the simple one-two-three count off

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procedure. In addition, dyads within the three main groups were formed strictly on a personal-choice basis. They were particularly effective in dealing with the most personal material. It was interesting to note that the most open participants appeared to choose an equally authentic individual as a partner, while those reluctant to reveal themselves selected similar counterparts.

While focusing in the area of relationships, some of the particularly effective exercises conducted in dyads were:

1. Describe your first sexual experience by emphasizing your feelings before, during and after and omitting the who and when.
2. Discuss three parts of your body you like and three parts of your body you don't like.
3. Discuss some unpleasant or uncomfortable sexual experiences you've had.
4. Describe three events that have influenced your own sexuality.
5. For five minutes think about the peak experiences - i.e., experiences of togetherness, joy, closeness, etc. - that you have had with a member of the opposite sex. At the end of the five minutes, share three of these experiences with your partner.

Desensitization in the sexual area was facilitated through the showing of sexually explicit films during the first two days of the workshop. Participation and involvement were enhanced by encouraging questions during the presentations, and by providing an authentic, accepting atmosphere.

In addition to disseminating information on human sexuality, encouraging an acceptance of ones own sexuality, and helping the participants to clarify and expand their own attitudes in this area, there were several simple techniques presented that can easily be used by paraprofessionals counseling clients. For example, a method

of treating premature ejaculation, the squeeze technique, was taught in conjunction with the showing of the movie "Squeeze Technique." Many sex therapists take the position that a technician can adequately explain this procedure to a couple. With a 98% success rate reported by Masters and Johnson, the effectiveness of this simple technique is remarkable. Another equally useful topic for paraprofessionals is the Kegel Exercises (enclosed). A growing number of gynecologists and sex therapists are adding these exercises to the treatment program for orgasmic problems. The exercises are also recommended for making good lovemaking even better. The importance of the pubococcygeus muscle makes good sense since orgasm is primarily a muscular response.

Relationship counseling is an essential, although often neglected, area in dealing with human sexual inadequacy. Many of the behavioral techniques used in treating sexual difficulties fail when an essential problem in the relationship is ignored.

Although dealing with a relationship is far more complex than describing sexuality, the topic can be approached. Facilitating communication within the dyad is the main focus taken at our workshop. Bach's procedures for resolving conflict (fair fighting) were among those methods taught. Also discussed were specific interview techniques for dealing with resentments, grievances, attractions and changes wanted in the relationship.

"Synthesizing the material and applying the techniques discussed to your particular setting and personality," was the agenda for the last day of the workshop. Although the scope of the four days was broad, the participants gained an awareness of methods and information relevant to their counseling positions. Moreover, impact and desensitization at the personal level contributed to greater ability for applying this new learning.